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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y ((CORRECT COLLECTIVE ADDEES))

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [SOCI](#) [JO](#) [SA](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: CHECHEN PRESIDENT REACHES OUT TO THE MIDDLE EAST

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Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells for reasons 1.4(b/d).

11. (C) Summary: Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov is looking to the Middle East to finance the reconstruction of Chechnya. Kadyrov met recently in Moscow with the visiting Saudi Crown Prince and traveled to Saudi Arabia and Jordan earlier this year. Kadyrov plans to visit Mecca in December, part of an effort to gain legitimacy as a Muslim leader. The Chechen's outreach to the Middle East is made with official Russian support, although analysts believe there are divisions within the GOR as to whether Arab funding could end up supporting extremists in the Caucasus. In the end, however, the GOR appears confident that it has more to gain by allowing Kadyrov to reach out to the Muslim world. End summary.

Kadyrov Meets Saudi and Jordanian Monarchs

12. (U) President of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov met Saudi Crown Prince Sultan bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud during the Saudi Prince's November 21-23 trip to Moscow. According to press reports, they discussed possible Saudi financial support for Chechen reconstruction and assistance for Chechens traveling to Mecca. Kadyrov also announced that he planned to visit Saudi Arabia in December, when he would make his first Haj to Mecca.

13. (U) Kadyrov last visited Saudi Arabia in August, when he was treated as an official visitor, met Saudi King Abdallah, and took part in well-publicized expressions of his Muslim faith. Kadyrov also met the head of the Islamic Development Bank, who promised to send representatives to Chechnya to identify possible assistance projects. From Saudi Arabia, Kadyrov went to Jordan, where he was received by King Abdullah. The Jordanian King reportedly pledged to assist Chechen reconstruction and accepted an invitation to visit Chechnya. Kadyrov's Middle Eastern visits have become more frequent since he first went to Saudi Arabia in 2004, reportedly seeking a pledge from Saudi officials to sever suspected links between Saudi charitable organizations and rebel fighters in Chechnya.

14. (C) Russian and Jordanian diplomats told us that while in Jordan, Kadyrov sought the support of the country's considerable Chechen diaspora, whose ancestors fled the Caucasus in the 19th century. Jordanian Counselor Hasan Saraireh understood that Kadyrov had not received any concrete pledges of support and would likely return to Jordan to continue his efforts. Saraireh said that Jordan rolled out the red carpet for Kadyrov as a signal to Moscow that it

wanted to improve bilateral ties and, hopefully, attract Russian investment.

Kadyrov Acts With Russian Support

15. (C) MFA Counselor Rashid Ismailov told us Kadyrov did not represent the GOR when going abroad, although his travel is coordinated with the MFA. During Kadyrov's August trip to Saudi Arabia, he was an emissary of sorts for the GOR and presented Saudi King Abdallah with a personal message from Putin. Ismailov explained that assisting the Chechen President demonstrated to Muslims, both foreign and domestic, that the GOR supported Kadyrov and his effort to rebuild Chechnya. Ismailov believed that the Saudis hoped their embrace of Kadyrov would foster better relations with Russia (reftel).

Kadyrov is "Putin's Guy"

16. (C) Analysts told us that they understood the Kremlin supported Kadyrov's outreach to the Middle East, but were divided as to whether Russian security services thought increased Arab influence in the Caucasus presented a threat.

17. (C) Middle East expert Georgiy Mirsky explained that the GOR strongly supported Kadyrov, who became "Putin's guy" thanks to his ability to lift the "Chechen albatross" from the Russian President's neck. However, this support did not necessarily translate into GOR funding of Chechen reconstruction, which led Kadyrov to seek support from the Middle East. Mirsky said the GOR, including the security services, understood Kadyrov's efforts could result in the presence of Saudi-funded mosques in Chechnya. Furthermore, the GOR knew Kadyrov would be welcomed by the Saudis, who wanted to demonstrate support for "official" Muslim leaders in the Caucasus in order to distance themselves from charges of funding terrorists.

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18. (C) Moscow Carnegie Center analyst Aleksey Malashenko argued that there existed a real division within the GOR on Kadyrov's outreach to the Middle East. The Kremlin supported Kadyrov, who was able to deliver a level of security in Chechnya, while the FSB feared his efforts would lead to increased Wahabbi and, possibly, extremist Islam in the Caucasus. Malashenko also claimed that the FSB feared Kadyrov would use Arab financial support to increase his political independence from Moscow.

Chechnya Will Not Welcome Saudi Wahabbism

19. (C) Ruslan Kurbanov, an expert on the Caucasus and Russian Muslims and political affairs editor of the bi-weekly magazine "Smisl," saw more subtle divisions within the GOR, which generally supported the "Kadyrov project" to stabilize Chechnya. Only certain elements within the FSB that did not understand Russia's Muslim population feared Saudi funding could lead to Wahabbi influence, while others understood the predominantly Sufi Caucasus would not welcome Wahabbism. Kurbanov explained that the official religious departments in the Caucasus worked closely with the FSB to keep the region free of extremist influence, and even different forms of Islam. As for Kadyrov's attempts to portray himself as a genuine Muslim while in Saudi Arabia, Kurbanov said this did not win over practicing Muslims who thought it an "insult" to see the very man who had oppressed "real" Muslims pretending to be one of them.

Comment

110. (C) While the level of official Russian backing for

Kadyrov's Middle East exploits may be debatable, the Kremlin clearly does not detect a threat from some level of official Arab influence in the Caucasus. By allowing Kadyrov to turn to Muslim countries for assistance, the GOR can claim credit for putting a "real" Muslim in charge of Chechnya.

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